

MOODY STILL LIVES

WORD PICTURES OF D. L. MOODY

by

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CHAPTER TWO

HOW DID A NEW ENGLAND COUNTRY LAD BECOME A WORLD POWER?

STARTING from nothing, Mr. Moody became the most influential spiritual figure that America has yet produced. February 5, 1937, the centennial of his birth, will always be remembered for its observance by Christian people around the world. How account for his rise?

Sam P. Jones, the great Georgia evangelist of over a generation ago, was once attacked by a newspaper man who said the papers had made him.

Sam replied, with his characteristic drawl,

“Let them make another!”

It is sometimes said that Northfield made D. L. Moody, meaning his sturdy ancestry and the rugged life of New England. While granting certain values to heredity and environment we can still ask,

“If so, why has not Northfield produced another D. L. Moody?”

The secret of his power and influential career must be found in quite other directions.

Biologists might claim that Mr. Moody was an accidental deviation from the normal conditions and antecedents into which he was born, like Benjamin Franklin, amazingly unique among thirteen children. I agree he was a unique phenomenon, but that would be to judge on a merely materialistic plane, ignoring important factors in his life. I would rather list him with a few outstanding men in church history like John Wesley, Martin Luther, and with men of the Bible like Paul, John the Baptist, Moses, where in every case there were spiritual crisis and vision and endowment by God for special work appropriate to a special time and need.

Four decisive events in his life, major crises, account step by step for his rise. They are, chronologically:

1. His acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as his Saviour, in Boston as a lad of 18 in 1855;
2. His first impressive experience in soul-winning in Chicago in 1860, aged 23;

3. His first realization of the immeasurable fulness of the Bible in Chicago in 1867;
4. His filling with the Holy Spirit in New York in 1872.

- He became a believer in Jesus Christ under his Sunday school teacher's leading in Boston.
- He got a taste of soul-winning by observing a dying teacher of his Sunday school in Chicago.
- He became a man of the Bible under the ministry of Harry Moorehouse, an English evangelist and Bible teacher.
- His Pentecostal experience made him a soul-winning evangelist to nations.

1. HOW HE BECAME A BELIEVER IN JESUS CHRIST

His conversion to God.

Young Moody left home early in 1854, and after a time found a job with two uncles in their shoe store in Boston. Among conditions they imposed on the boy was attendance at Mount Vernon Congregational Church and Sunday school. It was a revival church, with a zealous and eloquent minister, Dr. Edward Norris Kirk, but it was in connection with the Sunday school he found God. Here he was assigned to a young men's class taught by one Edward Kimball. He knew little about the Bible or its teachings, but he gave close, respectful attention to his teacher, and his demeanor in class was always earnest.

Let Mr. Kimball take up the story:

"I determined to speak to him about Christ and about his soul, and started down to Holton's shoe store. When I was nearly there I began to wonder whether I ought to go in just then during business hours. I thought that possibly my call might embarrass the boy, and that when I went away the other clerks would ask who I was, and taunt him with my efforts in trying to make him a good boy. In the meantime I had passed the store, and discovering this I determined to make a dash for it and have it over.

"I found Moody in the back part of the building wrapping up shoes. I went up to him at once, and putting my hand on his shoulder I made what I afterwards felt was a very weak plea for Christ. I don't know just what words I used, nor could Mr. Moody tell. I simply told him of Christ's love for him and the love Christ wanted in return. That was all there was. It seemed the young man was just ready for the light that then broke upon him, and there, in the back of that store in Boston, he gave himself and his life to Christ."

How tenderly he used to refer to that unforgettable transaction between himself and his Saviour! I heard him preaching in Tremont Temple, in 1897, when he said:

"I can almost throw a stone from Tremont Temple to the spot where I found God over forty years ago. I wish I could do something to lead some young man to the same God. I wish I could make people understand what He has been to me. He has been a million times better to me than I have been to Him."

At another time he said:

“The morning I was converted I went outdoors and fell in love with everything. I never loved the bright sun shining over the earth so much before, and when I heard the birds singing their sweet songs I fell in love with the birds. Everything was different.”

Mr. Moody did not often refer to his conversion. But then he was reticent about other great experiences in his own life, and about his evangelistic campaigns, he did not live in the past. He seemed to face forward toward coming opportunities in full assurance of faith.

He took me to see that shoe store, 43 Court Street, in 1897. A marker was placed on the building in 1930. Since then the building has been torn down and a new building erected, on which a worthy bronze marker will identify the site in coming years.

2. HOW HE BECAME A SOULWINNER

Mr. Moody was led to give up flattering business prospects in Chicago in 1860 through a heart-searching experience of soul-winning which he witnessed and shared in. The story can be told in his own words, quoting from my *Shorter Life*: —

“I had never lost sight of Jesus Christ since the first I time I met Him in the store at Boston, but for years I really believed that I could not work for God. No one had ever asked me to do anything.

“When I went to Chicago I hired four pews in a church, and used to go out on the street and pick up young men and fill these pews. I never spoke to those young men about their souls: that was the work of the elders, I thought. After working for some time like that, I started a mission Sunday school. I thought numbers were everything, and so I worked for numbers. When the attendance ran below one thousand it troubled me, and when it ran to twelve or fifteen hundred I was elated. Still none were converted, there was no harvest.

“Then God opened my eyes.

“There was a class of young ladies in the school who were without exception the most frivolous set of girls I ever met. One Sunday the teacher was ill, and I took that class. They laughed in my face, and I felt like opening the door and telling them all to get out and never come back.

“That week the teacher of the class came into the store where I worked. He was pale, and looked ill.

“What is the trouble?’ I asked.

“‘I have had another hemorrhage of my lungs. The doctor says I cannot live on Lake Michigan, so I am going to New York State. I suppose I am going home to die.’

“He seemed greatly troubled, and when I asked the reason he replied:

“‘Well, I have never led any of my class to Christ. I really believe I have done the girls more harm than good.’

“I had never heard any one talk like that before, and it set me thinking. After awhile I said:

“‘Suppose you go and tell them how you feel! I will go with you in a carriage, if you want to go.’

“He consented, and we started out together. It was one of the best journeys I ever had on earth. We went to the house of one of the girls, called for her, and the teacher talked to her about her soul. There was no laughing then! Tears stood in her eyes before long. After he had explained the way of life he suggested that we have prayer. He asked me to pray. True, I had never done such a thing in my life as to pray God to convert a young lady there and then. But we prayed, and God answered our prayer.

“We went to other houses. He would go upstairs, and be all out of breath, and he would tell the girls what he had come for. It wasn’t long before they broke down and sought salvation.

“When his strength gave out I took him back to his lodgings. The next day we went out again. At the end of ten days he came to the store with his face literally shining.

“‘Mr. Moody’ he said, ‘the last one of my class has yielded herself to Christ!’

“I tell you we had a time of rejoicing.

“He had to leave the next night, so I called his class together that night for a prayer meeting, and there God kindled a fire in my soul that has never gone out. The height of my ambition had been to be a successful merchant, and if I had known that meeting was going to take that ambition out of me I might not have gone. But how many times I have thanked God since for that meeting!

“The dying teacher sat in the midst of his class, and talked with them, and read the 14th chapter of John. We tried to sing ‘Blest be the Tie That Binds’ after which we knelt down to pray. I was just rising from my knees when one of the class began to pray for her dying teacher. Another prayed, and another, and before we rose the whole class had prayed. As I went out I said to myself:

“‘O God, let me die rather than lose the blessing I have received to-night!’

“The next evening I went to the depot to say good-bye to that teacher. Just before the train started, one of the class came, and before long, without any prearrangement, they were all there. What a meeting that was! We tried to sing, but we broke down. The last we saw of that dying teacher he was standing on the platform of the rear car, his finger pointing upward, telling us to meet him in heaven.

“I didn’t know what this was going to cost me. I was disqualified for business: it had become distasteful to me. I had got a taste of another world, and cared no more for making money.

“For some days after the greatest struggle of my life took place. Should I give up business and give myself wholly to Christian work, or should I not? God helped me to decide aright, and I have never regretted my choice. Oh, the luxury of leading some one out of the darkness of this world into the glorious light and liberty of the gospel!”

He gave up business for personal profit once for all, and never afterward tried to accumulate wealth.

3. HOW HE BECAME A MAN OF THE BIBLE

The next great crisis in Mr. Moody’s career occurred when he came to realize the immeasurable fulness of the Bible. The story is most suggestive.

It begins early in 1867, when the doctor advised a sea voyage for Mrs. Moody, who had a harassing cough. They decided to go to England for two reasons: Mrs. Moody was born in London and a sister was still living there, and Mr. Moody wanted to hear and meet some of the great Christian leaders in England, such as Charles Haddon Spurgeon of London, George Williams, founder of the Y.M.C.A., and George Müller of Bristol.

In the course of that trip Mr. Moody also went to Dublin, where he met Harry Moorehouse, “the boy preacher,” who introduced himself and said he would like to come to Chicago and preach. This incident had an important sequel which we want, and which can be told in Mr. Moody’s own words, again quoting from my *Shorter Life*:

“I looked at him. He was a beardless boy; didn’t look as if he was more than seventeen; and I said to myself, ‘He can’t preach!’ He wanted me to let him know what boat I was going on as he would like to return with me. I thought he could not preach, and did not let him know. But I had not been in Chicago a great many weeks before I got a letter which said he had arrived in this country, and that he would come to Chicago and preach for me if I wanted him. I sat down and wrote a very cold letter: ‘If you come West, call on me.’ I thought that would be the last I should hear of him, but soon I got another letter, saying that he was still in this country and would come on if I wanted him. I wrote again, telling him if he happened to come West to drop in on me. In the course of a few days I got a letter stating that next Thursday he would be in Chicago. What to do with him I did not know. I had made up my mind he couldn’t preach. I was going to be out of town Thursday and Friday, and I told some of the officers of the church:

“‘There is a man coming here Thursday who wants to preach. I don’t know whether he can or not. You had better let him try, and I will be back Saturday.’

“They said there was a good deal of interest in the church, and they did not think they should have him preach then; he was a stranger, and he might do more harm than good.

“‘Well,’ I said, ‘you had better try him. Let him preach two nights’; and they finally let him preach.

“When I got back Saturday morning I was anxious to know how he got on. The first thing I said to my wife when I got in the house was:

“‘How is that young Irishman coming along?’ (I had met him in Dublin and took him to be an Irishman, but he happened to be an Englishman.) ‘How do the people like him?’

“‘They like him very much.’

“‘Did you hear him?’

“‘Did you like him?’

“‘Yes, very much. He has preached two sermons from John 3:16, **‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life’**; and I think you will like him, although he preaches a little different from what you do.’

“‘How is that?’

“‘Well, he tells sinners God loves them.’

“‘Well,’ said I, ‘he is wrong.’

“She said: ‘I think you will agree with him when you hear him because he backs up everything he says with the Word of God.’

“I went down to church that night, and I noticed every one brought his Bible.

“‘My friends,’ began Moorehouse, ‘if you will turn to the third chapter of John and the sixteenth verse, you will find my text.’

“He preached a most extraordinary sermon from that verse. He did not divide the text into ‘Secondly’ and ‘Thirdly’ and ‘Fourthly.’ He just took it as a whole, and then went through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation to prove that in all ages God loved the world; that He sent prophets and patriarchs and holy men to warn them, and last of all sent His Son. After they murdered Him, He sent the Holy Ghost.

“I never knew up to that time that God loved us so much. This heart of mine began to thaw out, and I could not keep back the tears. It was like news from a far country. I just drank it in.

“The next night there was a great crowd, for the people like to hear that God loves them, and he said, ‘My friends, if you will turn in your Bible to the third chapter of John and the sixteenth verse you will find my text!’ He preached another extraordinary sermon from that wonderful verse, and he went on proving God’s love again from Genesis to Revelation. He could turn to almost any part of the Bible and prove it.

“I thought that sermon was better than the other one. He struck a higher chord than ever, and it was sweet to my soul to hear it.

“The next night—it is pretty hard to get out a crowd in Chicago on Monday night, but they came. Women left their washing, or if they washed they came and brought their Bibles. He said again, ‘My friends, if you will turn to the sixteenth verse of the third chapter of John you will find my text,’ and again he followed it out to prove that God loves us. He just beat it down into our hearts, and I have never doubted it since.

“I used to preach that God was behind the sinner with a double-edged sword, ready to hew him down. I have got done with that. I preach now that God is behind the sinner with love, and he is running away from the God of love.

“Tuesday night came, and we thought surely he had exhausted that text and would take another, but he preached the sixth sermon from that wonderful text, **‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have’**—not going to have when you die, but have it right here, now—**‘everlasting life.’** Although many years have rolled away his hearers never have forgotten it.

“The seventh night came, and he went into the pulpit. Every eye was upon him. All were anxious to know what he was going to preach about. He said, ‘My friends, I have been hunting all day for a new text, but I cannot find one as good as the old one, so we will go back to the third chapter of John and the sixteenth verse, and he preached the seventh sermon from that wonderful text. I remember the closing of that sermon.

Said he:

“‘My friends, for a whole week I have been trying to tell you how much God loves you, but I cannot do it with this poor stammering tongue. If I could borrow Jacob’s ladder, and climb up into heaven and ask Gabriel, who stands in the presence of the Almighty, if he could tell me how much love the Father has for the world, all he could say would be, **“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”**’”

It was a revelation to Mr. Moody of the inexhaustibility of Scripture such as he had never dreamed of. From that time he became a more diligent student of the Bible. He asked Moorehouse how to study, and invited friends to his Chicago home for probably the first “Bible readings” ever held in America.

4. FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

It is difficult to give an accurate account of the next outstanding crisis in Mr. Moody’s life. We are face to face with divine mystery, but yet reality. Mr. Moody told the story of it several times during the seven years I was with him, but never in close detail, and I think his words were never reported in full.

He regarded it as almost too solemn to talk about in public, but sometimes when he was speaking on God the Holy Spirit, he would testify to his own overpowering experience.

Let us begin in Chicago in the 1860's, after a church was organized out of his Sunday school converts and their families. Illinois Street Church was the scene of continuous revival activity, with Mr. Moody as its moving spirit, and frequently the preacher.

Two faithful and devout women used to attend his meetings and sit on the front seat. He could see by the expression on their faces that they were praying, and at the close of the service they would tell him they were praying for him. They sensed something lacking.

Praying for him! Why? What for? Wasn't he full of zeal and activity for God? Why didn't they pray for the people?

"We are praying for you that you may receive the Power."

"Haven't I got the power?"

"No, we are praying for you because you need the power of the Holy Spirit."

"I need the power! Why," said Mr. Moody, speaking of it in after years, "I thought I had power. I had the largest congregations in Chicago, and there were many conversions. I was in a sense satisfied. But right along those godly women kept praying for me, and their earnest talk about anointing for special service set me to thinking. I asked them to come and talk with me, and we got down on our knees. They poured out their hearts that I might receive the filling of the Holy Spirit. There came a great hunger into my soul. I did not know what it was. I began to cry as I never did before. The hunger increased. I really felt that I did not want to live any longer if I could not have this power for service."

Chicago was laid in ashes while he was in this mental and spiritual condition. The Great Fire commenced on October 8, 1871, and swept out of existence the whole north section of the city where he lived and worked. His church was burnt and his flock scattered.

Under these circumstances he left for the East to raise money for relief and the wherewithal to build a new church.

Mr. Douglas Russell, an English evangelist, supplies a link here? He says he was holding meetings in New York early in 1872 when he heard that Mr. Moody was at work in Brooklyn. Having met and worked with Mr. Moody previously, he crossed to Brooklyn and attended a Bible reading when the subject happened to be "The Holy Spirit: His Person, Offices and Work." Asked by Mr. Moody to speak, Mr. Russell made some remarks on Galatians 4, saying at one point that all believers have the Spirit of sonship, though all believers do not have the Spirit of power for service. Every believer is a child of God, being born of the Holy Spirit, but not every believer has received the filling of the Holy Spirit for service.

“At this point Mr. Moody, standing by my side, struck the desk with his fist and exclaimed with vehemence:

“I never saw that before! Been troubled about that for years! Never saw it before.”

I can visualize that episode: Mr. Moody listening eagerly to Mr. Russell, catching his point, clinching it *instantly* in his own experience in that expressive way.

Mr. Russell says it was the following day, in the streets of New York, that Mr. Moody became conscious of a power coming upon him and flooding his whole being with an overwhelming sense of the love of God in Christ. It was God the Holy Spirit!

Mr. Moody once said that during that trip East the hunger for spiritual power was ever upon him. The Chicago Fire did not dismiss or displace his yearning.

“My heart was not in the work of begging. I could not appeal. I was crying all the time that God would fill me with His Spirit. Well, one day in the city of New York—ah, what a day!—I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it, it is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years. I can only say God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different, I did not present any new truths, and yet hundreds were converted. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you should give me all the world. It would be as the small dust of the balance.”

Unquestionably something supernatural happened that day analogous to the marvels of the day of Pentecost for the apostles and others, as stated in Acts 2. It was a pivotal experience that explains the remarkable change that began and matured in Mr. Moody. His personal character gained an elevation that he never lost. The Bible became a new book to him under the revealing light of God, establishing his convictions and giving him that vivid realization of things divine. As with Paul, God revealed His Son in Mr. Moody that he might preach Him among the nations.

The great British campaign followed the next year. His singular power in preaching, which baffled both friendly and hostile critics on the merely human level, kept its high plane to his dying day. But he used to say: “We are leaky vessels, and must take pains to have grace replenished daily.”

It was my privilege to know Mr. Moody intimately, and I see in his Pentecost adequate explanation of his Christlike character and power. The seven years I was with him I never saw him do an ignoble deed, never heard him speak a mean or unkind word, never perceived in him selfish ambition or self-seeking.

I have heard of an address he gave at the College Student Conference at Northfield in 1893 when he divided his life into three definite periods:

- A period of **NATURE** before conversion.

- A period of **GRACE** after conversion,
- A period of **POWER** after his filling with God the Holy Spirit.

Of course, Mr. Moody was not unique in this Pentecostal experience. Many another can testify to the same blessed fact each in his or her own definite way, even though they were not lifted to the eminence and usefulness that Mr. Moody.

An individual Pentecost is the prerogative of every believer.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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